

MEMOIRS
OF THE
LIFE
OF THE

Rev. William Burkitt.

*Late Vicar and Lecturer of Dedham
in Essex.*

He was a Man that loved his God, and earnestly wished to win Souls to Christ. He spent his Time and Strength not as our modern Preachers do, in Luxury and Idleness, but in exhorting his hearers to prepare for an endless Eternity.



• LOCESTER, Printed for JOHN PYTT



THE
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The Rev. Mr. Burkitt.



THE Rev. Mr. *William Burkitt* was the son of the Rev. *Miles Burkitt*, M. A. who was ejected by the Act of Uniformity from *Netisberd* in *Norfolk*, in the year 1662. Mr. *William Burkitt* was born at *Hitcham* in *Suffolk*, July 25, 1650. In his childhood he appeared to be endowed with an excellent memory, which through the happiness of a good education, became a sacred repository. Mr. *Gosse* of *Bilstone* was his first schoolmaster for a year : he was thence sent for education to the school at *Stow-Market*, whence he was removed to *Cambridge School* under Mr. *Griffin*. While he was there it pleased God to visit him with the small-pox, which proved an happy dispensation to him, for then God began by the influences of his holy Spirit, to move him to attend in earnest to the things of his peace, and wrought an holy change in the temper of his mind. After his recovery from his dangerous

disease he was admitted into *Pembroke Hall* under the tuition of Mr *Gibbs*, and upon his tutor's removing from the college, Mr. *Abel* of the same house took him under his care. From the college he came to *Bilston-Hall* in *Suffolk*. In 1692 he removed to *Dedham* in *Essex*.

Mr. *Burkitt* kept a *diary*, in which are recorded the history of Divine Providence towards him, and many remarkable deliverances vouchsafed him. In this *diary* are also contained his thankful acknowledgments of divine assistance and success in his ministry, and the humble confessions of his sins and weaknesses, &c.

The following passages are copied from his *diary*. "While I continued, says he at school in "*Cambridge*, it pleased God to visit me with the small pox, but very favourably, and, as I hope, in great mercy laying the foundation of my spiritual health in that sickness, working as I hope, a prevailing thorough change in the very frame and disposition of my soul. May my soul, and all that is within me bless thy name, O Lord, that this sickness should by the blessing of thine holy Spirit, open my blind eyes, which has closed the eyes of so many in darkness and death! O happy sickness that ends in the recovery of the soul to God!

In 1666 God visited the town of *Cambridge* with the plague. The students in general fled into the country. I with two or three more continued shut up in the college, and from my
cham-

chamber window I beheld the dead bodies of persons swept away by the infection carried to their burial. These solemn spectacles, together with the melancholly condition of the town and nation, brought my soul to a holy seriousness.

At Easter 1681, before my approach to the table of the Lord, I took some fresh pains with my own heart, to find the state of my soul."

After this paragraph follow several indications of integrity and sincerity, namely,

"A sight of the deformity and sinfulness of sin, and of the superlative beauty and excellency of Christ

A love to the word of God, not only to his promises, but his commands, because of their purity and holiness.

An apprehension of danger in resting upon our own works and righteousness.

Finding it the hardest matter in the world to believe aright.

Grief for want of more godly sorrow for sin.

Jealousy lest hypocrisy should lie at the bottom.

To have a regard in our actions to the principle, the motive, and the end

Solemn dedications of ourselves to God.

Watching and prayer against the sins to which we are most inclined, as seeking in religious performances the praise and applause of men.

Real affliction for not loving God more.

Due regard to the duties of the second table,
such

such as to owe no man any thing, but love—rather to suffer than do wrong—to preserve the reputation of others—to value others by their real worth, and not by their regards to us.

Valuing the image of our Lord and Saviour, in whomsoever it appears, and esteeming them most who are most like him in holiness.

Loving our enemies, praying for them, and doing them good.

Sept. 3 1682, my neighbouring brother in the ministry, Mr. *Thomson* of *Roydon*, after having preached on the Lord's Day, was surprised by an apoplexy, and died in a short time. Lord who am I, that I should yet survive amidst the funerals of them who were younger, stronger, better, and more useful than myself? O let me double my diligence in working out my own, and helping forward the salvation of others, while the day of patience lasts, for thou, Lord, comest in an hour of which we are not aware!

New-year's day 1684, I was up soon after four o'Clock, desiring earnestly to begin the year with God, to renew my covenant with him, and to engage myself in an holy vigilancy and circumpect walking with and before the Lord the day following and the year following. The Lord keep it in the purpose of my heart for ever to continue faithful to him!

July 25, 1686. being my birth-day, I engaged myself to devote my first waking-time to God, and my dressing time to fruitful meditation of the

the mercy of a night's rest, some spending their time in pain, some in prison, and some in hell.

About *Midsummer* 1687. I received a petition from *Ipswich* on behalf of the *French Protestant Ministers*, and communicated the matter to several, whose hearts the Lord so graciously moved, that I collected for them above an hundred pounds. The Lord make me thankful, who gave me an heart to compassionate and help them."

By Mr. *Burkitt's* book of accounts it appears at large that this his labour of love for the poor *French Exiles* continued six years successively, namely, 1687, 88, 89, 90, 91 92. In which time, though he lived but in a country village, he so exerted himself far and near in this matter, as, by the merciful hand of God with him, as himself expresses it, to collect from private hands no less than two hundred sixteen pounds seventeen shillings.

Remarkable also were his care, pains, and prudent conduct in the distribution of this charity, for as he gave some part of it in specie, as necessity required, so that he might lay out the rest in the most frugal manner for the furnishing them with clothes and provisions, he rode about the country to the cheapest markets, tho' he sometimes went a journey of near twenty miles for the purpose. It may not be improper to add the close which he himself sets at the foot of his account.

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"All my charges, says he, in journeying from place to place, and all my labour and pains I account as nothing, but look upon it as the greatest honour of my life that God made me such an instrument for the relief of his persecuted members. *To God only be glory given by the least of his servants, William Burkitt.*

"Dec. 1692. Upon undertaking the charge of *Dedham* I resolved, by divine assistance, upon the following course for the benefit of my people, namely, to pour out my soul to God every day in prayer for them; to preach constantly thrice in the week, to administer the Lord's supper once in two months, to catechize the youth at church, and others at my house, and to go from house to house through the town, warning and directing."

Upon a *New-year's* day. "Relying on God's gracious assistance I resolved to go through the work of the year chearfully, humbly begging of God to raise me above all difficulties, to fortify me against all discouragements, and to give me wisdom to walk discreetly before my observers.

Meditating upon the state and condition of the town under the visitation of the small-pox, I earnestly desired of the Lord to direct me to suitable subjects, while under that dispensation; and accordingly I preached upon these texts at the lecture, Ps. lvi. 3. *At what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.* Amos iii. 6 *Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid?* Micah vi. 9. *Hear ye the rod.* Exod. xv. 26. *I am the*

Lord that bealeth thee John v. 14. Behold, thou art made whole, sin no more.

I began to catechise at church, the small-pox preventing my doing it sooner. I preached upon Gen. xviii. 19. *Abraham will command his children and his household after him.* Whence I prest the general duty of family-governors, and afterwards the particular duties of reading the Scriptures, and family prayer, concluding from John xiii. 17 *"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."*

Jan. 1. 1695. I rose early this morning and reflected with joy and sorrow on the year past; with sorrow for my miscarriages, with joy for the goodness I have received from God, and some service done for him.

Christmas, 1696, being a severe time for the poor through the severity of the weather, and want of work by reason of the great scarcity of money, I exhorted my people to turn the feasting of the rich into feeding the poor, assuring them, that less at the table, and more at the door, would be better accepted; and accordingly feasting was universally laid aside, and the poor plentifully relieved.

At this time I met with a very unjust and unexpected accusation from ———, whom I had faithfully served, and sought to oblige. The consciousness of my own innocence supported me, and I hope God will do me good by all. Some persons had never had a particular share in my prayers but for the injuries they have done me.

God honoured me sometimes in suffering his own enemies to declare themselves mine; however, he often convinced, and always restrained them that they could not considerably hurt me. Blessed be my Defence and the God of my mercy!"

The following are his holy resolves, which I wish all who call themselves christians, and especially christian ministers would adopt as their own.

"I resolve, says he, that secret prayer by myself alone shall be performed every morning, before any other work be undertaken, and that family prayer shall be performed constantly and seasonably at most convenient times.

I resolve to speak evil of no man; but if any be angry and insolent, to answer them with meekness and gentleness,

I resolve if I go into company, not to speak much, and to endeavour to divert vain discourse to a favourable subject.

I resolve to be charitable according to my ability, and to watch for opportunities to do good.

I resolve to be cautious of promising, and when I have promised to keep strictly to my word.

I resolve to have innocent mirth mixed with good discourse at my table.

I resolve to spend some time every day in the week in fruitful meditations walking in my garden."

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[The subjects proposed were the joys of Heaven, the last judgment, death, the torments of hell, the various mercies of God, and the passion of our Lord.]

"I resolve every day to entertain humble thoughts of myself.

I resolve to put a charitable construction upon the actions of others

I resolve to call myself to an account every night how I have spent the day."

Mr. *Burkitt* preached much, spared not himself at home, or abroad, and delighted in his master's work. In his preaching he was clear and easy to be understood, calculating his discourses to profit his hearers, and render them serious and holy. Besides his heavenly matter, and acceptable words, there was something of a charm in his voice; and it pleased God to crown his public labours with great success upon many of his hearers. He wanted not seals of his divine mission.

He used the allowed liberty of prayer in his own words, and herein had divine matter, and solemn moving expressions, assisting the affections of such who joined in prayer with him.

He administered the Lord's supper with much solemnity, and his sermon and prayer before it were adapted to inspire deep devotion in the communicants.

He found time to visit the sick, and others and in their houses to instruct, admonish, exhort, and comfort them, as their cases required.

In his visits to the poor, he not only ministered to their souls, but inquired into their bodily wants and procured for them the supplies they needed.

Among his intimate acquaintance he was cheerful, but yet always inclined to quit the innocent pleasantries, and turn the discourse into a serious channel.

In his common conversation he conducted himself with sobriety, justice, humility, and affability. No spots were to be found in his feasts, no unworthy behaviour stained his holy character. Wherever he appeared there appeared the Christian and minister.

Some treated him unkindly, but he forbore speaking either bitterly or contemptibly of his enemies; and if they needed his service he was ready to afford them it, heaping coals of fire upon their heads.

Knowing the mischiefs of animosities, he used his persuasions, his interest, and his friends to reduce his jarring neighbours to peace, and left nothing in his power undone to effect a reconciliation.

In reference to young persons, besides his public catechising of them which he conducted in a very agreeable manner, he was very frequent, solemn and importunate in his petitions to God for them. They were much upon his thoughts, and his desire for them was that they might remember their Creator in the days of their youth.

His family-religion was such as became the
gospel.

gospel His house was an house of morning and evening prayers, and the reading of the scriptures was daily observed in it, besides family prayer twice in the day he prayed with the most intimate companions of his cares, joys, and sorrows.

He was a strict observer of the Lords day, and did not think the duties of the day were over when the public worship of God was at an end; but he spent the evening with his family in hearing them read the scriptures, in examining them concerning the sermons they had heard, in catechising them, in praising God, and in praying with them and for them.

He was a great redeemer of time. Variety of business and improvement were his chief diversions. He was a man more than ordinarily mortified to the pleasures and vanities of the world.

Upon the Lord's day, *October 17. 1703*, while he was attending in the congregation, another officiating he was struck with that sickness which put an end to his days. His disorder was such as made him leave his beloved place the house of God and it proved the last time of his appearance there. Upon returning to his house his distemper increased but with intermissions, allowing some happy moments for thinking and speaking.

In the short time of his illness, and in the view of approaching death, he very seriously entertained his friends who came to visit him, and prayed much himself with great ardor.

In the midst of his bodily affliction, devout aspirations.

aspirations, and blessed hopes he remembered his beloved *Dedbam*, and in the near approach of death signed a letter to his diocesan, recommending a successor to him, whom he hoped would be faithful and diligent in the spiritual care of the flock he was now leaving.

In his sickness God made his face to shine upon him: the Spirit of God witnessed with his spirit his adoption, and he went with a full sail to heaven as one of his much-valued friends, a witness of it, expressed it, to whom speaking of the high pleasures of the Lord's supper, in which they had often joined, and calling the wine in the sacrament the wine of the kingdom, he broke forth into these words, "But what will it be to drink the wine of the kingdom *in the kingdom*?" Taking solemn leave of a friend a day or two before his death, he said, "I shall leave you, but may the presence of Father, Son and Holy Ghost be with you; may the presence of the whole Trinity be with you! I hope to see you again with joy at the resurrection of the just." And he added, "What you have seen in me that is good and imitable, follow it, but what you have observed is not so, let not your affection and love to me sway you to do it."

Thus lived and died this holy man. God blessed the town of *Dedbam* with Mr. *Burkitt's* ministry and labours eleven years and an half, and removed him when he was not far gone in his declining age, when the powers of both body and mind were.

were yet in their vigour. His strength was such, and he conducted himself with so much temperance and moderation in every thing but in his work (there indeed he exceeded) that it might have been hoped that he had been built for fourscore, but God took him away when he was but just turned of fifty-three. A seven days conflict with a very malignant fever put an end to his life. He was taken with his death sickness upon one Lords day, when he was in the service of God at church, and he went to keep his everlasting sabbath on the Lords day after about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, when he rested from his labours, while his works follow him.

He was a very industrious peace maker among his neighbours and acquaintance, sparing neither his pains nor purse for the reconciling differences among contending persons. He was always very ready and forward to promote pious and charitable designs, respecting both the bodies and souls of others. Many things of this nature might be said, but a few shall be related to justify this part of his character.

He preached some time to the people of a country village at a considerable distance from his own charge, who for a long season had been seldom provided with sermons, and, by his endeavours and assistance from others obtained by his interest, that village has had a settled minister for some years. By his great care, pains, and charges he procured a pious minister to go and settle in *Carolina* —

And

And he expended not a little of that with which God had blessed him toward the maintenance of some poor students in the university of Cambridge.

In his last sickness, when his friends about him bewailed the great loss which they feared was coming upon them by his decease, he desired them not to be too much concerned for him, for to him to live would be Christ, and to die would be gain, and added, "that God would provide for them." He blessed God that he had finished what he designed upon the New Testament; he said that he had ushered this work into the world with many, very many prayers, and he hoped, thro' the divine blessing, that it would prove very beneficial to many, and especially to his own people. The declaration of several persons by his dying bed that he had been the instrument of their conversion put him into a transport of joy. His patience in his last sickness was very exemplary. He said he had preached patience, and written of patience, and that therefore he was bound to practise patience. His frame in his sickness was a continued series of prayer, thanksgiving, and cheerful resignation to the divine will. A little before he poured out his last breath, he prayed, *Come, Lord Jesus. Make a short work of it!* "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace."

